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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MADRID 002495

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [CU](#) [SP](#)

SUBJECT: SPAIN: VISIT OF CUBA TRANSITION COORDINATOR CALEB MCCARRY

Classified By: DCM Hugo Llorens; reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

¶1. (C) Summary. Cuba Transition Coordinator Caleb McCarry visited Madrid September 26-27 for meetings with Spanish MFA officials, political figures (including former Spanish President Jose Maria Aznar), and opinion leaders, as well as radio and print interviews on Spanish media. In his meeting with MFA Director General for Iberoamerica Javier Sandomingo, McCarry urged Spain to move swiftly to share a draft of a joint statement in support of a democratic transition in Cuba. Sandomingo said that his office was working on such a statement to be coordinated with EU members and warned that "nothing moves quickly" in the EU. Sandomingo said that in Spain's view, a lengthy but stable transition was preferable to a swift chaotic one. McCarry said an orderly transition was also a key objective for the USG, but that a continuation of the current regime would only exacerbate conditions on the ground. On the margins of a Cuba seminar at the Popular Party think tank "FAES," former Spanish President Aznar told McCarry he stood ready to help the USG promote a democratic transition in Cuba and offered suggestions on other European leaders that might be helpful. In a meeting with Spanish think tank and opinion leaders, McCarry stressed the USG's position that a transition must be led by the Cuban people. Though Spanish interlocutors were receptive to McCarry's moderate message, it is clear that the gradual Spanish transition to democracy remains their point of reference with regard to Cuba's coming transition. This mindset is reflected in the Spanish Government's favoring a gradual rather than a rapid transition. It will be difficult to shift Spanish authorities away from this approach, particularly when they believe it is desirable, for both domestic and foreign policy reasons, to show independence from the USG on Cuba policy. End Summary.

//MFA: JOINT MESSAGE WITH EU ON CUBA WILL TAKE TIME//

¶2. (C) McCarry said the USG was looking forward to receiving the draft text of a joint statement promoting a democratic transition in Cuba, per the results of the high-level US-Spain discussions on the margins of the UNGA. Sandomingo said that Spain would not undertake a bilateral US-Spain statement, but that a joint US-EU statement was possible, as was a unilateral EU statement on Cuba. He emphasized that any EU statement would take time to negotiate and said Spain would not accept "unrealistic" language that might be provided by some in the EU. Sandomingo said Spain wanted to proceed cautiously, reassuring Latin American governments that Spain would work with them on Cuba as well as with the EU and ensuring that the EU's actions did not send signals that could "lead to anarchy in Cuba." McCarry said the USG

had been under the understanding that Spain would share language the week of September 25. Sandomingo said that his office was working on a statement, but that he was unsure when it would be ready to be shared with the U.S.

13. (C) McCarry reminded Sandomingo that the Secretary had strongly underlined to EU ministers, including Spanish FM Moratinos, the importance the USG placed on democratic countries sending clear signals to Cuba on the need to proceed with a democratic transition. Sandomingo said that his view was that Spain would not add much value if Cuba and Latin America saw Madrid as being in lock-step with Washington. McCarry disagreed, saying that it would be better for all concerned if the post-Castro leadership faced a united front of democratic countries; it would be less useful to have the U.S. as the only party pressing the Cuban leadership to move towards democracy. McCarry noted the moderate U.S. response to reports of Castro's illness and said a key USG message to the Cuban leadership was not to repress its own people. In that vein, the USG was prepared to work with other EU countries to help arrive at a statement that would be acceptable to Spain and to more forward-leaning EU members.

14. (C) Returning to his main theme, Sandomingo repeated his fear of chaos in a post-Fidel Cuba. "We want regime leaders to abandon power in an orderly fashion rather than leaving a power vacuum. We want to convince them that they have a greater stake in a transition than in clinging to power." McCarry said that if that was the case, then Spain should send this message clearly. He said the USG had made clear that reconciliation would be an important part of any transition and that the USG would respect those who did not

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carry out acts of repression.

//MEETING WITH FORMER PRESIDENT AZNAR//

15. (C) McCarry attended an off-the-record seminar on Cuba transition issues at the opposition Popular Party-affiliated think tank "FAES," which is headed by former President Aznar. The keynote speaker was Jesus Gracia, former Spanish Ambassador to Cuba during the Aznar administration (NOTE: A highly-regarded diplomat without political affiliations, Gracia was nonetheless assigned to unfavorable MFA duties in 2004 for criticizing the abrupt shift in Spanish policy towards Cuba. He is now in the private sector. See Paras 8 and 9 for additional notes on Gracia's comments. END NOTE). Aznar told McCarry and the DCM that he remained committed to promoting a democratic transition in Cuba. McCarry thanked Aznar for his efforts and requested his suggestions on other European leaders who might be willing to engage on Cuba, particularly in Germany since it will be assuming the EU Presidency. Aznar said that German Chancellor Angela Merkel could be helpful and that Interior Minister Wolfgang Schaeuble would likely be forward leaning as well on the Cuba issue. Aznar expressed his willingness to assist the USG in any way that might be helpful.

//MEETINGS WITH OPINION LEADERS, MEDIA//

16. (U) McCarry was interviewed on "Punto Radio," a rapidly growing non-partisan radio station with a listenership of 600,000, and separately by Spanish wire service "EFE." During his radio interview, McCarry emphasized the importance the USG placed on Spain's role in promoting a rapid, peaceful transition in Cuba, as well as the USG's strong belief that only the Cubans themselves could lead such a transition. The interviewers asked whether U.S. sanctions on Cuba should be eased as a show of goodwill on the part of the USG and whether the U.S. had concerns regarding Venezuela's potential role as a spoiler. McCarry said the USG was prepared to work with any Cuban government that clearly put Cuba on the path to a democratic transition and he described the assistance contemplated by the Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba

(CAFC).

17. (U) Over lunch at the DCM's Residence, McCarry also met with a group of Spanish think tank figures and editorial writers, including representatives of leading daily "El Pais" and of the Elcano Institute, Spain's premier think tank. The participants generally discussed Cuba's coming transition on the basis of Spain's own experience during the post-Franco period, saying that a gradual transition was both probable and preferable. All agreed that Raul Castro could not keep Fidel Castro's model intact, but opinions differed as to how far he would go in adopting pragmatic measures to keep the regime's hold on power. McCarry reiterated the USG's message that regime leaders should not fear change and should refrain from repressing their own people.

//AN INSIDER'S VIEW//

18. (SBU) Former Ambassador Gracia used his intervention at FAES to outline the actors and circumstances that will shape Cuba's transition. He said that during his time as Ambassador in Havana, Spanish authorities had sought without success to establish relationships with the Cuban Armed Forces, and to a lesser extent with the Communist Party. He described the two entities as the "pillars" of the Cuban Government. With respect to the Armed Forces, he said Cuban officers were very correct in their contacts with Spanish counterparts, but would not deviate from the official line and would discuss only the most superficial matters. Gracia said the internal polling conducted by the Communist Party was one of the regime's most important tools and key to helping them avoid explosions of discontent. He expressed his view that dissidents were not prepared to directly challenge the authority of Fidel's successors, but that the international community had to help by maintaining a clear stance in support of democratic principles and by continuing to engage dissidents despite Cuban Government pressure to ignore them. Gracia cautioned that the Castro regime had succeeded in painting the Cuban exile community as focused on revenge and in recuperating confiscated properties, which Gracia said was unfortunate since the exiles would be key agents of change.

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19. (C) Following the seminar, Gracia contacted poloff to convey his appreciation for McCarry's participation in the seminar. Gracia said that he remained in contact with Castro regime insiders, some of whom had told him that political and economic conditions would have to be eased in a Raul-led government. In an earlier conversation, Gracia had related his good relationship with Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque, even at the nadir of Cuban-Spanish relations in 2004. Gracia warned that the U.S. should not underestimate Perez Roque, whom he described as an ideological hardliner, but also a skilled and confident politician who enjoys strong relationships throughout the Castro regime.

//COMMENT//

110. (C) Cuba Transition Coordinator McCarry's visit brought into relief the theme that seems to underlie most Spanish thinking on Cuba's transition: that Cuba's transition will likely mirror Spain's gradual experience in the 1970s and 1980s, and moreover that it is desirable for Cuba to undergo a gradual rather than a rapid transition. Even those who advocate greater support for dissidents cite civil stability as their overriding concern and are thus loathe to call for the immediate overturning of the existing order in Cuba. As a consequence, the Spanish Government is comfortable in working towards a soft landing for Fidel Castro's successors, in hopes that they can be convinced over time that they must adopt a new political and economic model. It will be difficult to shift Spanish authorities away from this approach, particularly when they believe it is desirable, for both domestic and foreign policy reasons, to show

independence from the USG on Cuba policy.
AGUIRRE